

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 20, 2012

Agenda Item: Draft Statewide Fisheries Management Plan

Division: Fish and Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Plan

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 60 minutes

Background

The FWP Fish and Wildlife Division is proposing a Final Statewide Fisheries Management Plan. The plan identifies overarching goals and direction for core fisheries programs, including fisheries management, fisheries habitat, fishing access and recreation management. The plan establishes the management direction for each waterbody under FWP authority, the management objectives for the fish found in the waterbody, and any special considerations or management issues that apply. The plan also provides an overview on laws, rules and policies that affect fisheries management. The plan provides guidance to FWP and the Commission for development of future policies, regulations, and project/program priorities.

Public Involvement Process and Results

Public involvement included: a web page devoted to the plan; statewide and regional press releases; post cards to 1500-member mailing list; Montana Outdoors magazine article; communication with angling groups; radio coverage (Montana Outdoors Radio Show); 10 public meetings; 47-day comment period. FWP received comments from 77 individuals, organizations, and agencies. Comment highlights include:

- Overall support for plan, specific sections of the plan.
- Questions on how the plan will be evaluated, updated.
- Request for more details on whether the plan will allow for flexibility during implementation.
- Plan largely documents existing programs, request for details, objectives and priorities.
- Request that the plan include section on climate change.
- Request changes to Management Types and Fish Origin Labels.
- Request that the plan do more to describe how FWP manages non-native fish.
- Requesting that the plan do more to explain how FWP responds to illegal introductions.
- Request for more information on how FWP evaluates/operates its hatchery program.
- Request more emphasis on importance of family and youth angling opportunities.
- Comments on species management for particular waterbodies.
- Questions about the draft environmental assessment, its scope of analysis and conclusion.
- Questions about the public involvement process, concern over length of comment period.

Alternatives and Analysis

The Proposed Final Plan is based on the Draft Plan and Environmental Assessment, with changes to reflect the public comments. Highlights include new sections on climate change, plan evaluation and adaptive management, family and youth fishing opportunities, and non-native fish management. There is expanded information on the hatchery system and overall edits to improve clarity. Alternatively, the Commission could adopt additional changes, revise the proposed final plan, or some combination of the two.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the Final Plan. It is the result of a comprehensive planning process and improvements were made to the Draft Plan in response to the public comments.

Proposed Motion

“I move that the FWP Commission approve the Final Statewide Fisheries Management Plan.”